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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (10/21): President Mahmoud Abbas will move ahead with elections if Hamas refuses to sign the national reconciliation agreement

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Main Stories:  
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The dailies report on Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas's meeting with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo yesterday. Abbas stated that the PA remains committed to national reconciliation, but reiterated that he will issue a presidential decree to hold presidential and legislative elections in January, 2010 in case Hamas refuses to sign the agreement. Abbas also stated that Hamas' decision to evade national reconciliation surprised him and noted that the PA and Egypt will not accept any amendments to the Egyptian reconciliation agreement.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadida reports on the deputy chief of the Hamas political bureau Mousa Abu Marzouq's interview with Al-Arabiya TV. The report quotes Abu Marzouq saying that there is no harm in further discussing the Egyptian proposal for national reconciliation in order to integrate Hamas amendments to it. Abu Marzouq noted that "some items were dropped from the original version which we agreed to with Egypt." He also commented on President Abbas's announcement that elections will be held in January 2010 by saying that "Abu Mazen can't conduct the elections separately in the West Bank."

The dailies report on Palestinian Liberation Organization Chief Negotiator Saeb Erekat's talks with US officials in Washington. Erekat told Al-Ayyam in a phone interview that Secretary Hillary Clinton and Special Envoy George Mitchell assured him that there is no agreement between the US and Israel regarding settlements and that there is no US peace plan. Erekat noted that he explained to the US that the PA will not accept partial solutions regarding the cessation of settlement activity and urged Israel to respect their obligations under the road map in order to restart negotiations.

Al-Quds leads with news on the continued settlement activity in the West Bank despite Israeli claims of freezing construction. The story leads with news on an agreement between the Israeli Ministers of Defense and Interior to facilitate the issuance of building permits for constructing new settlements in the West Bank.

The dailies report on Israeli President Shimon Peres criticizing the Goldstone report before the US Ambassador to the UN Suzan Rice yesterday. Peres described the report as "shameful."

Hamas newspaper Al-Resalah reports on Hamas spokesperson Sami Abu Zuhri noting yesterday that Hamas' proposed amendments on the Egyptian reconciliation agreement are to ensure the successful implementation of the plan after the agreement is signed. He noted that a Hamas delegation will visit Cairo to discuss their reservations. Abu Zuhri criticized President Abbas's announcement to hold the elections in January 2010.

Al-Quds radio (Hamas outlet from Gaza) reports that Egypt gave Hamas 24 hours to determine its position on the national reconciliation plan without any amendments. If they do not respond, Egypt will publicly accuse Hamas of obstructing the reconciliation process.

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BLOCK QUOTES:  
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1) Al-Quds independent daily runs an editorial under the title "Announcing the elections date doesn't mean deepening the division"

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(10/21): "From the legal perspective, we should hold the presidential and legislative elections before January 2010 ... but the Palestinian factions have to sign the national reconciliation proposal in order to agree on the date for holding the elections[either January or June according to the Egyptian plan], otherwise the state of division will leave Palestine with a constitutional vacuum that will be rejected by the Palestinian people."

2) Ashraf Al-Ajrami opines in Al-Ayyam daily independent under the title "Unity and reconciliation are not considered by Hamas" (10/21): "Hamas will not agree to national unity whether it signs the reconciliation agreement or not ... The interests of Hamas, Israel and Iran meet together to protect the Hamas empire in Gaza and allow Hamas to ruin any chance at national unity ... Achieving national unity is not a goal for Hamas, Israel, or the regional powers."

RUBINSTEIN